1. Outline and explain two ways that age is stigmatised in mass culture [10]

One way in which age is stigmatised in mass culture is through representations of ageing. In contemporary society, old age is often presented as a stigmatised identity due to stereotypical portrayals of elderly people either being seen as fragile and not contributing to society, or as grumpy and conservative in their views. Phillipson argues that the elderly are often negatively portrayed due to capitalism. As they are no longer perceived to be economically contributing to society, they become stigmatised as an economic burden on either their families or on the welfare system. Evidence of having conservative views can be found through media portrayals of the elderly as being intolerant to social changes and fixated on the past. Recent portrayals of the elderly as being responsible for political decisions such as Brexit, places the elderly in a stigmatised position of being seen as uncaring about the ideas and attitudes of younger generations. However, with the UK population ageing, representations of old age have changed, particularly with legislation against age discrimination.

A second way in which age is stigmatised in mass culture is representations of youth cultures. Young people, particularly in their teenage years and early twenties are often stigmatised as they are portrayed as being prone to deviant behaviours, such as criminality, drug-taking and excessive alcohol use. Furthermore, attitudes towards youth subcultures often portray young people as 'folk devils', according to Cohen and responsible for the decline in moral standards in society. These moral panics often arise due to youth subcultures having different norms and values than mainstream society and moral entrepreneurs often perceived this to be a sign of moral decline in society. Young people are often stigmatised by mass media for these behaviours, and this can lead to blocked opportunities for young people to express themselves freely and without comment, generating frustration at their position in society and potentially resulting in further deviance.

Item A

Sociologists have suggested that there have been changes in the way in which people's sexuality is represented in society over the last 50 years. While society has become more open about sexuality, there has been an increase in the sexualisation of individuals' physical appearances.

1. Applying material from item A, analyse two ways in which sexual identity is formed in contemporary society. [10]

One way in which sexual identity is formed in contemporary society is through 'greater representation of sexuality' (Item A) in contemporary society. In recent years, there has been greater representation of individuals who identity as LGBTQ in wider society and more positive role models for this community. However, this has not always been the case, with society largely being based upon a heteronormative approach to relationships in the media, through religious beliefs and in education. However, changes such as the repeal of Section 28 which banned the discussion of homosexuality in schools, the Equality Act of 2010 and the Same Sex Marriage amendment in 2013 demonstrated changing attitudes towards sexuality in the UK. Whilst this demonstrates progress towards equality in society on grounds of sexual orientation, and provides equality under law, some people are still subjected to verbal and physical abuse for their sexual preferences, with Stonewall and the Millennium Cohort Study both finding higher levels of bullying and mental health issues in young people in the LGBTQ community.

A second way in which sexual identity is formed in contemporary society is through the 'sexualisation of individual's physical appearances' (Item A). Whilst this has long been an issue discussed by feminists, recent changes in the way in which both males and females are presented have caused sociologists to question the impacts of sexualisation of people's bodies on society. Mulvey argued that there exists a 'male gaze' in society, whereby males sexualise women's bodies and this shapes their sexual identity. Furthermore, the recent focus on men's bodies and how males should look, has led McRobbie to discuss how there is an increased focus on individual beauty in society and that males are no longer exempt from this. The impacts of sexualisation for both males and females on their sexual identity can potentially be damaging, resulting in low self-esteem, eating disorders and mental health issues. However, there are increasing movements towards greater body confidence for individuals, despite the ongoing impacts of sexualisation.